



DANA-FARBER
CANCER INSTITUTE

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THE JIMMY FUND

August 7, 1985

Harold Varmus
Nomenclature Committee
University of California Medical School
San Francisco, CA

Dear Harold:

Max Essex asked me for a comment regarding what would be an appropriate name for the virus currently called either HTLV-III or LAV. He also provided me with all of the correspondence he received from you including the comments of committee members, and interested parties. This correspondence also included comments from individuals who, like me, are not committee members but who have been closely associated with AIDS research for some time.

I strongly favor the name HTLV-III for the virus. I would not oppose the name HTLV-III/LAV or LAV/HTLV-III. My reasons are as follows:

Right of Discovery

Unless there is a good reason to the contrary the original discoverers of the virus should have the right to call the virus the name they chose. Both the laboratories of Drs. Gallo and Montaigner have valid claims to the original discovery of the virus. Although the Paris Laboratory published first, I am convinced that Gallo had, in fact, isolated the virus at or before late 1982 to very early 1983 as did the Paris Laboratory. The Paris group included Montaigner, Charmann and Barre-Sinoussi. The original paper of the Paris group calls the virus Human T Lymphotropic Virus. It was only later that it was called LAV then IDAV etc. The names now selected by these investigators are HTLV-III for the NCI group and LAV for the Paris group.

Given what must be considered to be lack of concensus of the committee members on the appropriate nomenclature, there is no compelling reason not to abide by the choice of the discoverers themselves.

In this regard, Dr. Jay Levy's proposed name has no merit as his report merely repeated the original isolations using previously published methods.

Common usage - The names HTLV-III or LAV are now used by the vast majority of workers in the field. I would guess that more than 90% of the research papers published and of the descriptions of this virus in the press referred to as either HTLV-III or LAV. To change the name now would be to sow confusion - not clarity. Everyone now knows what virus is being discussed when either HTLV-III or LAV is mentioned.

Public awareness - The public now knows the virus as HTLV-III, HTLV-3 or LAV. This is a very important consideration. The virus is a major public health hazard and we are in the process of undergoing an epidemic of diseases introduced by this virus. Tests for "HTLV-3" are now common. I enclose the American Red Cross brochure to emphasize this point. To change the name now would be irresponsible from a public health perspective. In the United States HTLV-3 must be used, or, if necessary, a compound name might do, i.e., HTLV-III/LAV or LAV/HTLV-III. Public confusion would definitely result if the name were now changed. It is clearly too late to change the name. The name is entrenched in the public mind and to alter it now might cause great consternation and confusion and to add a further feeling of unease in the public's mind regarding this disease.

With regard to the public perception - HTLV-III is a far better name than LAV. LAV refers to a specific disease state. HTLV-III does not. One very important issue is to educate the press and the public regarding the current epidemic. The epidemic is not an AIDS epidemic - it is an epidemic of HTLV-III infection. Only one of the life threatening consequences of this infection is AIDS. The idea that the HTLV-III virus infections produce a variety of long term-life threatening illnesses - can best be addressed only by calling the virus HTLV-III and not including a specific disease state in the name. We do not know yet all of the consequences, nor perhaps, even the most serious consequences which may be manifest by HTLV-III infection.

Scientific Basis for the Name HTLV-III

The name HTLV-III is certainly justified scientifically. No violence is done to current, admittedly loose, nomenclature standards. Scientific justifications include:

1. It is a human, T lymphotropic retrovirus, the third one isolated.
2. It shares a property of transacting activation with both HTLV-I and II. Incidentally, the report that virus transactivates the RSV LTR is incorrect as shown by our studies and those of John Coffin and Ann Skalka.
3. Certain other structural features of the organization of the gag gene and homology of the DNA at the DNA protein level of Rous Sarcoma the protease genes of HTLV-I and II suggest that this virus might be more closely related evolutionarily to HTLV-I and II than it is to other retroviruses with the exception of certain lenti-viruses.

With these considerations in mind, I hope the committee will recommend the name HTLV-III, or possibly HTLV-III/LAV. To do otherwise would be unfair to the investigators, and would be to add confusion to the mind of the public as well as to the scientific community at a time when exactly the opposite is required.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'William A. Haseltine', written in a cursive style.

Dr. William A. Haseltine
Chief, Laboratory of
Biochemical Pharmacology

WAH/tjp
Enclosure